United Nations A/63/PV.9

General Assembly

Sixty-third session

Official Records

9th plenary meeting
Thursday, 25 September 2008, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Abani (Niger), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Address by Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of the Republic of Tajikistan

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rahmon (*spoke in Tajik; English text provided by the delegation*): First of all, allow me to congratulate Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the office of President of the General Assembly and to express the hope that, under his leadership, the General Assembly at its sixty-third session will achieve its goals, the most important of which are the further strengthening of the United Nations system for the sake of peace and international security and addressing the global issues that are becoming the challenges of the twenty-first century.

This year, humankind has faced a number of interrelated crises, including the energy, food, climate and financial crises that have combined to cause a general development crisis. The consequences of those newly emerged challenges have had the most severe impact on the social conditions of millions of people in the developing countries and on States with transitional economies, my country among them.

However, people have not lost their hope for a more just and fruitful world. They pin their hopes on a powerful and efficient United Nations capable of mobilizing and focusing its resources on solutions to the most urgent issues of the day. We believe that there is an urgent need to efficiently develop dialogue and cooperation among all the entities of this multipolar world and to avoid applying double standards in international relations. It is equally important not to allow people of different races, religions, continents and regions to be set against one another.

No single country in the world, not even the most powerful, is capable of meeting single-handed the challenges of our time, which range from climate change to the necessary uncompromising fight against international terrorism. Today more than ever before, the new generation of global issues requires a collective response and the United Nations, entrusted with a broad mandate, is the only existing instrument capable of addressing them.

One example of the new generation of global issues is the human right to an adequate food supply. The dramatic rise in the cost of food and energy has

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

08-51845 (E)

called into question the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The food crisis has affected the poorest populations in the most negative way. In Tajikistan, 93 per cent of whose entire territory is mountainous and only 7 per cent suitable for agriculture, the food crisis has affected two thirds of all households. Additional coordinated efforts and efficient measures are called for if we are to avert a further degradation of the situation of global food security. In the present circumstances, the use of food for biofuel production is inhumane and immoral.

Our hope is that donor States will undertake all the necessary political, financial and economic measures to prevent a worsening of the food crisis. If they do not, millions more could suffer further impoverishment. We also expect that official international assistance will be increasingly allocated to the development of agriculture and that artificially created barriers in trade will eventually be removed.

It is quite obvious that the United Nations should play the key role in addressing the food crisis and related world agricultural policy. Tajikistan supports the activities of the United Nations High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis mandated to design urgent response measures to the food crisis. The efforts of the Task Force should also be focused on assistance and on developing joint agreed long-term approaches to ensuring food security throughout the world. The High-Level Conference on World Food Security in Rome and the resulting adoption of a declaration were important steps in that direction.

Within the Food and Agriculture Organization, it is necessary to revitalize activities in the transfer of advanced technologies and seeds and in the provision of financial and technical assistance to developing countries. We call for enhanced support for the assistance programmes being implemented through the World Food Programme.

The lives of millions of men, women and children on Earth depend on their ability to exercise their human right to an adequate food supply. That issue requires not protracted discussions, but resolute practical action, since the food crisis, which deprives human beings of their dignity, is no less of a threat than terrorism itself. We believe that the world's leading countries should act more responsibly to mitigate the consequences of the global energy, food, climate and financial crises, particularly with regard to the poor and developing States, which are most affected by the devastating consequences of those phenomena.

Tajikistan, which has fertile soil and is rich in water resources, can make its own contribution to the resolution of that problem. More than 55 per cent of all water resources in the Central Asia region originate in Tajikistan. Not only is that amount of water sufficient to meet the freshwater needs of agricultural irrigation and related economic sectors in the region; it can also serve as a major source for the generation of ecologically sound electrical energy. Tajikistan's hydropower capacity, in particular, is estimated at 525 billion kilowatt-hours, and only 5 per cent of that capacity is currently being utilized.

It is only by taking a comprehensive and mutually beneficial approach to the use of hydropower and other natural resources that the States of Central Asia can ensure sustainable development in the region and help to resolve its food and environmental problems, notably through the efficient use of those resources. Only mutually beneficial cooperation aimed at such use can bring well-being to the peoples inhabiting that vast region. We hope that our plans will be supported by the Bretton Woods institutions and by United Nations partners in the private sector.

I believe that we need to create an economic mechanism for the transfer of water and energy resources, which would serve the interests of both upstream countries, which are rich in water resources, and downstream countries, most of which are rich in hydrocarbon raw materials.

The problem of climate change is already affecting our region, in particular its water resources. As a result of global warming, Tajikistan's glaciers have diminished in size by more than 30 per cent. That has produced low water levels in our rivers over the past three years, which in turn has caused grave social and economic problems by triggering drought, a locust invasion and other difficulties. Without the implementation of hydropower projects, our country will be unable to achieve the MDGs or arrive at sustainable growth, as shown clearly last winter, when weather of unprecedented severity revealed all the difficulties of the transitional period. Next winter and summer are expected to be even more challenging.

Obviously, water is an essential resource, because it is needed not only to sustain human life, but also for industrial purposes, environmental protection and the

entire development process. Addressing urgent water-related issues and promoting international cooperation in meeting the water challenge are the goals of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", 2005-2015, which was initiated by the Republic of Tajikistan. I invite Member States to designate representatives to participate in the International Freshwater Forum, to be held in Dushanbe in 2010, to review the practical implementation of the internationally agreed water agenda.

Despite the many water-related events held throughout the world at various levels in recent years, the issue of water remains urgent. For that reason, in order to ensure that water issues are comprehensively addressed and that efforts taken at the national, regional and global levels are strengthened, the Republic of Tajikistan proposes that a special session of the General Assembly be convened to review progress made in achieving the goals set for the Water Decade and identify areas for further action.

Today, in addition to the general debate, a high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals is being held at United Nations Headquarters. My country regards timely achievement of the MDGs as a priority issue. The Government of Tajikistan has been implementing its national development strategy up to 2015. The strategy, developed at the initiative of the United Nations and with its direct involvement, reflects a largely new approach to development. It takes into account global experience in the area of development, the implementation of similar strategic documents, lessons drawn and conclusions reached during the previous stages of the country's development, current realities and development prospects. However, I must note that the federal financing of the country's social progress is limited by the growth rate of our economy.

It is obvious that, in many respects, achievement of the MDGs depends on the approach taken by the international community to the provision of assistance to developing countries and the timely mobilization of internal and external resources. In that respect, Tajikistan associates itself with the appeals made to the donor community to double its development assistance, which is vital for the support of sustainable growth and for the achievement of internationally agreed goals.

The proposal that debts accrued by developing countries be relieved in exchange for the implementation of national projects in the area of sustainable development remains relevant. The soaring costs and, in many cases, artificially inflated prices of hydrocarbon raw materials and food have considerably worsened and complicated the financial situation of poor and developing countries. Even partial cancellation of their debt would help, since it would release funds that could be invested in education and the entire social sector, environmental protection, the fight against HIV/AIDS and other areas.

The forthcoming Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha, will provide a good opportunity for the further development of effective measures to provide the resources needed to achieve the MDGs. Our hope is that the Doha Conference will provide new impetus for the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus and that it will enhance the spirit of global partnership and solidarity.

The situation in Afghanistan, which has been devastated by a long period of conflict and violence, is a source of grave concern. Afghanistan needs not only a larger military presence on its territory, but also targeted economic, technical and humanitarian assistance. Experience has shown that military action against terrorist groups is often far less effective than carefully thought-out non-violent political and economic measures. We must, as a matter of urgency, realistically consider involving other influential regional actors, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in resolving the Afghan issue.

Strengthening international cooperation in the fight against terrorism is inseparable from counteracting the trade in illicit drugs. It is essential that we assist the Government of Afghanistan in destroying the technological and financing links of the modern illicit-drug industry. Consolidated efforts to that end will enhance the achievement of the goals set out in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the Paris Declaration.

The global system of fighting terrorism, transnational organized crime and illicit drug trafficking which is currently being shaped cannot be built without support from regional organizations. In this regard, Tajikistan salutes the efforts of the United Nations to expand its cooperation with relevant regional organizations. These are powerful structures, and involving them in addressing global issues will

prevent modern challenges and threats from taking on undesirable dimensions.

The United Nations and peacebuilding are inseparable. We appreciate the devotion of those who selflessly worked at the United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peacebuilding and pay tribute to those who lost their lives while performing their professional duty. The settlement model for the inter-Tajik conflict, involving assistance from the United Nations and guarantor States, has been acknowledged as a unique example of both peacebuilding and preventive diplomacy.

We support the Secretary-General's initiative to reform the peacekeeping machinery, and we believe that it is essential to continue providing the relevant political, financial and logistical support to peacekeepers in order to help them cope with their difficult missions.

Tajikistan endorses the priority attention given by the United Nations to enhancing the effectiveness of assistance to countries that have endured internal conflicts and supports the activities of the Peacebuilding Commission, which is mandated to contribute to ensuring coordination and enhancing the effectiveness of international assistance to such countries. In order to strengthen peace and stability, countries that have suffered internal conflicts need not only humanitarian assistance but also concrete help in dealing with their economic and social problems, along with support for their efforts to establish the foundation that is essential for a transition to sustainable development.

This year the international community celebrated the 1,150th anniversary of the birth of Abuabdullohi Rudaki, the founder of Tajik-Persian literature. The essence of his moral philosophy can be described as praise for such eternal spiritual values as kindness, beauty, tolerance and mutual assistance. Centuries later, the poetry of Rudaki continues to call for strengthening friendship among nations and expanding dialogue among civilizations; it sings a hymn to humanism and harmony. As noted by the Secretary-General,

> "Rudaki's timeless and profound writings provide an inspiration for the Alliance of Civilizations, our initiative to counter extremism and heal the divisions that threaten our world". (*Press release SG/SM/11646*)

I am confident that the common human values praised by Rudaki are in harmony with the objectives pursued today by the United Nations worldwide. I am very optimistic about our ability to make the world a better place and to meet the aspirations and hopes of our peoples.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Tajikistan for the statement he has just made.

> *Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.*

Address by Mr. Branko Crvenkovski, President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

> *Mr. Branko Crvenkovski, President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.*

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Branko Crvenkovski, President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Crvenkovski (*spoke in Macedonian; English text provided by the delegation*): It is a great honour and pleasure for me to have the opportunity to address this distinguished gathering of statesmen from United Nations Member States. Despite past and continuing challenges, this Organization remains an irreplaceable forum where the representatives of many nations can exchange opinions concerning the most pressing issues facing the world we all live in.

Allow me at the outset to welcome the election of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua as President of the Assembly at its sixty-third session. I convey to him our unwavering readiness to cooperate during the year of his mandate. At the same time, allow me to congratulate the previous President, my compatriot Srgjan Kerim, on his contribution to the work of the world Organization over the past year, during which numerous issues of global importance

were considered. Through his engagement, my country, the Republic of Macedonia, has confirmed in the best possible way the values for which we stand and the principles in which we believe when it comes to international relationships, namely, multilateralism as the key tool for cooperation and for the promotion of the fundamental values of peace, democracy and human rights and freedoms.

I take this opportunity also to welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who contributed greatly to the useful and functional operation of the Organization over the past year.

In 2008 we enter the second half of the term envisioned for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. The results accomplished thus far are not to be underestimated, but they are still far from satisfactory. Furthermore, even the Goals that have already been achieved are now jeopardized by the new challenges and problems we are facing: the surge in oil and food prices and the adverse effects of climate change.

During this year, a slowdown in economic development has been noted in many countries; that is confirmed by numerous indicators forecasting regional and global recession. It is therefore of the utmost importance to devise new stimuli for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. Our debate should thus focus on issues such as development and the implementation of effective concepts for sustainable development, as a crucial part of any agenda for the maintenance of long-term peace, stability and security in the world.

Speaking of issues related to the sustainability of peace and security, we have unfortunately to note that here there are not many reasons for satisfaction. We are still facing numerous crisis situations and old and frozen conflicts, as well as a series of recent turbulent incidents and tensions in several regions of the world. Terrorist acts continue to occur with worrisome frequency, yet Member States remain unable to reach consensus on a truly necessary global counter-terrorism convention. Such recalcitrance has rightly led some people to question the relevance of the United Nations in the present context, as well as the true meaning and scope of multilateralism and the selective implementation of international law and principles.

This year we commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it is only proper to ask ourselves whether universal respect for its provisions is possible. Human rights problems will certainly not decrease if there continue to be different interpretations of the provisions of the Declaration or if those provisions are only partially implemented. Acceptance of the entire body of human rights is the basis of the rule of law and fundamental to resolving bilateral and international conflicts. Only if those provisions are universally accepted and sincerely supported by all of us will humanity be able to proceed on the path towards progress.

Solutions to problems should be sought within the framework of respect for agreed norms and through equitable dialogue and cooperation. In that context, the United Nations has a specific and valuable role that should not be neglected. It is therefore especially important to develop the Organization further so that it may become more efficient and more relevant in a broader sense, as well as more responsible for the people on whose behalf it acts. I am deeply convinced that our differences are among the greatest values that we possess and that each Member State, regardless of its size, has a valuable contribution to make. It is therefore necessary to overcome our existing differences for the sake of a more efficient United Nations that will serve the world in the twenty-first century in the best possible way.

Over the past few years, South-East Europe and the Balkans have begun moving in the right direction. Although it is certain that not all open problems and issues have been resolved, the tendency of the region towards closer integration with international bodies is clearly discernable. The activities of my country, the Republic of Macedonia, are directed towards continuing participation in and support for regional projects and the consistent promotion of comprehensive regional cooperation with all neighbouring countries. We do not doubt that only together with the rest of the Balkan countries will we be able to contribute to the accelerated integration of the entire region into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

At the domestic level, the Republic of Macedonia is continuously working towards the sustainability of its specific model of functional multi-ethnic democracy. We believe that our model has broad and positive regional implications because it has shown that it is possible for different nations and cultures to share the same territory and coexist productively.

Two strategic goals that have enjoyed our highest priority for years are integration into the European Union and NATO. In recent years, we have invested significant resources and focused all our efforts on the accomplishment of those goals. Unfortunately, at the NATO summit held in April 2008 in Romania, an international precedent was set when the narrow national interests of one country were presented as being more important than the established principles of international law.

Despite the obvious absurdity of the issue, my country is participating actively and constructively in the negotiating process with the Republic of Greece, mediated by the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Matthew Nimetz. At the same time, we have consistently respected our legal obligations and affirmed our constructive role by making numerous suggestions and concessions during the long-standing process.

I recall that, at the time of Macedonia's admittance to the United Nations in 1993, the first major legal precedent was set. A decision was adopted on that occasion to the effect that, instead of using the name which my country had chosen, other Members would address us as "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

Unfortunately, I am forced to conclude that in that time the other party has not demonstrated the same level of dedication to its agreed obligations, as confirmed by its flagrant breach of the Interim Accord signed by both countries in 1995. According to that document, the Hellenic Republic is legally bound not to object to Macedonia's application for membership to international, multilateral and regional institutions and organizations in which the Hellenic Republic is already a full member. Contrary to the agreed obligations, at the NATO summit held in April 2008 in Bucharest, Greece objected to the invitation to admittance to NATO extended to the Republic of Macedonia and insisted that, prior to integration, a mutually acceptable solution to the dispute must be reached. The very logic of the negotiations was seriously undermined by that act, while at the same time the principles of the United Nations Charter were derogated. Taking advantage of its status as a standing member, the Hellenic Republic has begun obstructing our integration into the European Union, using similar arguments.

Let me take this opportunity to highlight once again before the Assembly our position, which has been openly expressed on numerous occasions. As a responsible country fully aware of its internationally agreed obligations, the Republic of Macedonia is ready to accept a fair compromise and a reasonable solution that will not deny our national and cultural identity. It is understandable that we are not ready to consent to just any kind of solution in a case of such national importance. If our integration into international institutions is to help stabilize our State, then we should not allow ourselves to be humiliated and internally destabilized by an unsatisfactory compromise.

To conclude, allow me to reiterate the well-known fundamental position in which we, as a State, believe and intend to firmly uphold in the years to come. The principles and values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations are the highest goals around which we should all unite. Respect for those principles and for the full equality of States and peoples is the sole guarantee for the noble mission of creating a more dignified and just world.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Branko Crvenkovski, President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. James Alix Michel, President of the Republic of Seychelles

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Seychelles.

Mr. James Alix Michel, President of the Republic of Seychelles, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. James Alix Michel, President of the Republic of Seychelles, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Michel: I have come to this gathering of nations as a representative of one of the smallest nations on the planet. Seychelles is but a speck on the globe, home to some 87,000 people — a people that

believes in justice, freedom and fairness. In this concert of nations, every country great or small has a voice. Our voice comes from the heart of a people that, like countless others, lives in trepidation. I have come here neither to beg nor to accuse, but to reach out to the conscience of all who have gathered here at the United Nations. I ask them to feel the heartbeat of humanity.

When this great institution was founded over six decades ago, its architects were motivated by noble and just ideals: human freedom and dignity, justice, human rights, peace, security, harmony and development. Those ideals are values that we hold dear, timeless values that are the soul of the United Nations. I have faith in those values. So do the people of Seychelles.

Have we lived up to those values? Yes, we have averted many wars. We have resolved many conflicts. But in this age of relative peace and security, new enemies are staring us in the face: hunger, pandemics, underdevelopment, poverty, economic turmoil, environmental degradation and the inequity of the global trading system. Those are the enemies which, if not overcome, will shatter the foundation of civilization. Those are the enemies that we have to battle and conquer to create a better world for our children and their children. Those are the battles that we have to win to save our planet. Those are the issues that the modern United Nations has to grapple with and overcome.

Can it succeed? I believe it can. It can if we endow it with a new vision — a vision in which hope for mankind goes beyond rhetoric; a vision that provides for bold leadership, clear commitments and targets so that we can focus on the greater good for humankind; a vision in which leaders come together, setting aside petty differences and charting a new course for the United Nations, a new road map to resolve the climate crisis and an appropriate framework for the energy and food crisis; a vision in which appropriate institutional reforms are put in place and adequate resources mobilized to achieve the Millennium Development Goals; a vision that encompasses justice and fairness in trade and in which the specificities of small island developing States are not only recognized but accepted as criteria for aid to further development.

I believe in that vision. We can all share it; we can all help to make it a reality. Our deeds have to be governed by firm commitments to and perseverance in finding sustainable, pragmatic and equitable solutions to the complex issues that threaten our very existence.

We should abandon solutions that continue to enrich the rich and impoverish the poor and the vulnerable. When it comes to world trade, for example, it seems acceptable to some that wealthy countries are allowed to give subsidies to their farmers, as a result of which exports from developing countries become uncompetitive, but that developing countries are obliged to follow World Trade Organization rules to the letter, even if they undermine domestic economic policies formulated to protect vulnerable sectors of society.

We offer facilities to foreign investors to exploit our natural resources, which are traded for high profits on the international market, while we receive a pittance in licensing fees. It is like taking a bowl of food from the poor and giving them back a spoonful as a generous donation. For instance, of the total value of tuna — our "blue gold" — caught and trans-shipped in our waters by foreign fishing vessels every year, Seychelles receives only 7 per cent in revenue, comprising licensing and trans-shipment fees. That situation is, to my mind, unacceptable. I ask whether it is unreasonable to fight for a better share of the proceeds.

On a separate but related note, while the prevailing situation of insecurity in international waters off the coast of Somalia is of grave concern to the international community, it is of graver concern to Seychelles, whose exclusive economic zone borders that maritime zone of hazard. A little more than a week ago, some 40 European fishing vessels lay idle in Port Victoria as a result of an act of piracy on one of their own. Such acts can have a serious impact on the lifeline of the second pillar of our economy at a time when we are engaging with the Bretton Woods institutions in a process of economic reforms. I wish to thank all our partners and friends — in particular France — for all the efforts they have deployed against that scourge.

The skewed nature of the global trade regime is not the only impediment to development. I return to the case of my country. The fact that we have a high human development index, ranked fiftieth in the world, and that we fall in the middle-income group of countries excludes us from access to grants and soft loans that would have helped our country to develop

even further and faster. And that is despite the fact that donor organizations have confirmed that all aid, grants or loans that have been given to Seychelles have been properly and accountably utilized for the benefit of our people. It is as if we were being penalized for our success in raising the standard of living of our people. We have fallen into the so-called middle-income trap.

Furthermore, no account is taken of the fact that Seychelles falls into the category of highly vulnerable countries as defined by the Commonwealth vulnerability index. Why should our relative success be the reason for the denial of access to special development funds, especially those addressing education, water, sanitation and health? Is that the price we have to pay for improving the quality of life of our people? Is that the price we have to pay for dedicating over 50 per cent of our territory to environmental conservation for the benefit of the whole world?

Our natural environment is our future, our treasure trove of biodiversity. We attach the highest importance to its preservation, not only for ourselves, but also for the rest of the world.

Like many other small island States, Seychelles remains vulnerable to the threats posed by global warming, climate change and rising sea levels. These phenomena are linked to human activity on our planet that, collectively, the nations of the world have the power to influence — if only we had the will to do so.

It is not right that small island States should have to run the risk of being submerged by rising sea levels while some nations refuse even to acknowledge their responsibility for the high levels of environmental pollution now threatening the planet's resources.

Despite our small size, we shall continue to lead. And we shall lead by example. By our example, we have shown and will continue to show to all that sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are achievable in our present generation.

Through our efforts and with the support of international NGOs, we have started a global movement — the Global Island Partnership — to get all small islands and nations with islands to devote part of their natural resources to environmental resilience and sustainability. And, more recently, Seychelles set up the Sea Level Rise Foundation to galvanize global action to address the devastating impact of climate change on our planet.

Are those worthy causes not deserving of international support, especially in the International Year of Planet Earth? We are running out of time, and we must combine our resources and know-how to avoid the physical damage and social and economic toll that threaten us.

Some of the greatest afflictions of humankind today are hunger, starvation and malnutrition. Today, food security is our foremost concern. The challenge for many Governments is to bring food to ordinary people at affordable prices. The dramatic increase in grain prices has led to huge increases in the price of bread, milk, meat and other commodities. The hungry are getting hungrier, more desperate and angrier. The divide between rich and poor is widening day by day. We are faced with the looming threat of starvation on a global scale and, with it, the prospect of violent upheavals.

We can act to resolve the food crisis. First, there must be political commitment. Secondly, subsidies given to farmers by the industrialized countries have to be removed. Thirdly, the industrialized countries should make available to the South much-needed resources to improve our infrastructure. Give us the resources, technology and infrastructure to produce more food and there will be no need to help us feed ourselves.

Mankind has had a hand in most, if not all, of the crises we face today. We gather here every year in the name of freedom, human rights, democracy and sustainable development to deliver eloquent speeches. In the process, we procrastinate and bury solutions to our problems in reams of resolutions and declarations.

Can we honestly say that we have got our priorities right? Can we say that we live in a just world, where every man, woman and child enjoys the same rights? Are we, as leaders, living up to the noble goals for which the United Nations was set up? Let our conscience provide us with the answers.

A revamped United Nations system is best placed to facilitate progress in all the areas I have mentioned: food security, trade, climate change and energy. I am asking for a clear action plan. Multiple conferences and talk shops are not the solution. We need a fresh and effective approach to global governance and I am

convinced that with the right level of resources, and with the political will and commitment, we can start to tackle the fundamental flaws in our global governance and trade regimes. I am asking the rich nations to support that endeavour and assume their collective global responsibility.

Let those of us who believe in freedom and dignity show solidarity among ourselves. Let us help each other to overcome the obstacles in our path. Let us focus on a global vision for the betterment of every nation.

In conclusion, I leave members with this note of reflection: "History to the defeated May say Alas but cannot help or pardon ..." W. H. Auden's words will define the future of humanity, in terms of its history. The time for action is at hand. We must change, or be redefined by history, like many great civilizations of the past.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Seychelles for the statement he has just made.

Mr. James Alix Michel, President of the Republic of Seychelles, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Armenia.

Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sargsyan (*spoke in Armenian; English text provided by the delegation*): First, allow me to express gratitude to Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session, for his able leadership. I would also like to congratulate and wish success to its current President, Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann.

I am representing a country that, during the last several weeks, has found itself in a situation that is unacceptable for the twenty-first century.

Once again blood was shed in the South Caucasus and once again innocent people died because we, the leaders, failed to bring a peaceful resolution to an existing conflict. The armed conflict, which erupted in a matter of hours, threatened not only the entire region but well beyond it.

Recently, the unsettling expression "cold war" has re-emerged. I hold the view that the main task of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session should be to issue a collective rejection of such developments. Memories of the previous cold war are very fresh and its consequences linger still.

In that regard, I believe that our main task should be the establishment of a new, dependable and viable structure. The challenges facing humankind in recent decades have been transformed and reshaped in such a way that they cannot be addressed exclusively with the structures established after the Second World War. We continue to respond to today's horizontal, interwoven challenges — such as terrorism, international crime, drug trafficking and others — through institutions that were designed predominantly to settle disputes among States. Regional cooperation can be a core means of addressing those new challenges. Armenia has always advocated such cooperation and is confident that it is one of the most effective means of addressing problems among States. In that regard, open borders, interconnecting lines of communication and interrelated economic systems are crucial.

The United Nations was among the first institutions to respond to the current global problems resulting from rising food and fuel prices. That phenomenon represents a real threat to all the countries of the world. For poor countries, its consequences will be devastating. Unfortunately, even in such circumstances we continue to witness unilateral sanctions and border closings. In the face of global challenges, countries should work together to prevent the further deterioration of the situation and to implement the sustainable development agenda. Otherwise, we will jeopardize our collective efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Neighbouring States have always had and will continue to have problems with each other. However, those problems cannot be solved if there is no

dialogue. With that in mind, and taking advantage of a football game between our national teams, I invited the President of Turkey to Yerevan. I welcomed the bold decision of President Gül to accept the invitation, which made him my co-author in the "football diplomacy" initiative.

We discussed an array of bilateral and regional issues. The most important outcome was our decision not to leave current problems to future generations. I am confident that the time has come to solve Armenian-Turkish problems, and on that issue I observed a similar resolve on the part of President Gül. I am certain that it is necessary to move fast and resolutely in that direction.

The events of the past few weeks shocked the South Caucasus region and made it a focal point of the international media. I believe that they hold very serious lessons for us all. I would mention only two.

First, we Member States must adhere strictly to the letter and spirit of the United Nations Charter. If any country rapidly increases its military budget and brags about it; if arms limitations stipulated under international agreements are openly violated; and if a country has signed a ceasefire agreement, which constitutes an international responsibility, but threatens to resume military action on any pretext, we must respond swiftly and firmly. Prevention is preferable to cure, and a potential military conflict must be averted at the planning stage. We must confirm unequivocally that the violation or threat of violation of an existing ceasefire contains elements of aggression.

Secondly, the time has come to seriously consider the right of peoples to self-determination. We continue to witness in our own time how the mere mention of self-determination may be tantamount to a declaration of suicidal intent. One of the basic principles of international law — the right of peoples to self-determination — has become grounds for exile, ethnic cleansing or genocide. There is no doubt in my mind that it need not be that way in the twenty-first century.

We do not insist on the idea that each claim to self-determination should be resolved through secession. However, we have seen that outcome become the solution to conflicts more often than not. When a nation finally has the opportunity to exercise its inalienable right, it is immediately categorized as an exceptional case. That seems to have become a pattern. There is no doubt that, if it is to be viable, such a solution must be endorsed by all the parties involved. That is why we continue to negotiate actively with Azerbaijan in the framework of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in seeking that country's recognition of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has been de facto independent for almost two decades.

The people of Nagorno-Karabakh, who followed the legal path in declaring their desire for self-determination, were subjected to a brutal war. For years they hovered on the brink of extinction. At that time, Nagorno-Karabakh was only an autonomous region with neither a regular army, arms and ammunition, nor any intention of or ability to occupy Azeri territory. I think it is at the very least unfair to label as "occupants" people who fought for their right to exist; and yet, Azerbaijan has done just that, even from this high rostrum.

In my country, even schoolchildren are very familiar with the United Nations. Such children — the future leaders of my country and of the world — may not have a profound understanding of the United Nations Charter, but they know that the Organization was created to ensure peace and security for humankind, to promote friendship among nations, to solve problems jointly, and to protect human rights. The schoolchildren of my country trust the United Nations, since in their eyes it is primarily the building with the "pretzel gun" memorial before it.

Some months ago within this building, resolution 62/243 was adopted with only 39 States out of 146 voting in favour. The resolution was adopted in response to an episode in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. A fundamental and sensitive problem with deep roots and painful and bloody developments, and for which immense efforts have been made to secure a peaceful settlement, was decided upon by the majority in support of one of the parties.

The outcome was more than predictable — a new wave of belligerent statements in Azerbaijan, false encomiums, political speculation and so on. However, the voting in Azerbaijan seemed to be little more than window-dressing. I hope that the real interests of Azerbaijan lie not in its misrepresentation at the international level of the different elements of the conflict, but rather in a peaceful and comprehensive resolution, which is equally in the interests of the

Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia.

The process mediated by the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group is aimed at reaching precisely that goal, and I believe that it was in that understanding that almost four fifths of the United Nations membership abstained in the voting or did not vote at all on that resolution. The voting records of the United States, France and Russia — the most well-informed third parties regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its resolution — are ample demonstration of that fact.

Is it absolutely necessary to shed blood to understand that frozen conflicts demand an expert and conscientious approach and cannot be solved through discussions in various forums? We have worked in earnest under the mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs. Is it not possible to at least abstain from creating new challenges to the process? Is it not our mutual goal to erect a pretzel gun monument for the Armenian and Azeri children of our region? I assure the General Assembly that those kids deserve one.

This year, we will celebrate two significant achievements in international law: the sixtieth anniversaries of the adoptions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. For us Armenians, as for other peoples that have survived genocide, those anniversaries are more than important. Armenia has done and will continue to do everything it can at the United Nations to provide for the continuous advocacy of the genocide Convention and its enforcement. Genocide cannot be the concern of one nation alone; genocide is a crime against humanity.

As for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we fully realize that Armenia, as a young democracy, has important work ahead in order to guarantee the full and efficient implementation of the entire complex of human rights. To that end, we are trying to learn from countries with extensive experience and not to repeat others' mistakes. Those lessons are not always easy to take, but we are confident that, for a country like Armenia, they are a fundamental guarantee of sustainable development. At the same time we realize that, in a rapidly changing reality, along with scientific progress and advances in information technologies, the protection of human rights and the processes to monitor States' fulfilment of that obligation should be seriously reviewed and reconsidered.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Armenia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Litokwa Tomeing, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Mr. Litokwa Tomeing, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Litokwa Tomeing, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Tomeing: I am honoured and privileged to be able to speak in this great Assembly on behalf of the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

I sincerely congratulate Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann on his election. We have every confidence in his wisdom and able leadership to guide us through our deliberations. I extend my sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for his leadership and commitment to the work of the United Nations.

As this body enters its sixty-third year, I am moved to express my profound appreciation to those visionaries who foresaw the importance of the United Nations and took it upon themselves to establish the necessary structures for the governance of our collective affairs. It is not that the creation of this body has led to the cessation of war; it has not. Rather, it is that we now have an international forum in which nations can talk over and deliberate issues of mutual concern. One could well imagine what the alternative to talking might be in certain circumstances.

Like its sister island States in the Pacific region, the Marshall Islands is struggling with the implementation of its Millennium Development Goals. Our effort has been made difficult by unforeseen global forces capable of draining every ounce of our resources. The Marshall Islands is a small economy and inter-island distances are vast, making transportation excessively expensive. Formulating development strategies that address the new conditions has not been easy.

An excellent example in this case may be found in the current energy crisis arising from the escalation in the cost of fossil fuel. Its adverse impact has been immediate and severe. The transportation of essential goods and the movement of people to and from far-flung islands have been sharply curtailed. The distribution of essential services and food products has been acutely impaired, crippling our ability to sustain normal public services and posing a particular threat to food security and medical services. The rising cost of fossil fuels occurring in rapid succession has left the Marshall Islands with no choice but to declare a state of economic emergency.

I am sure, and the International Monetary Fund has observed, that at the height of the crisis, when the cost of a barrel of oil was over $140, numerous other countries were also at the tipping point.

As a small island developing State and a member of the Pacific Islands Forum, we are now exploring the concept of bulk purchasing of petroleum, as endorsed by Pacific Forum leaders in Niue last month. Given our painful experience, we request that the international community give special consideration to the creation of a comprehensive financial facility that can help small island States to cope in times of crisis. In addition, such a facility should also help small island States transition from fossil fuel-based energy to affordable and renewable energy sources.

Our small island States in the Pacific region are among the lowest greenhouse gas emitters in the world, yet we bear the full brunt of climate change and its frightful consequences. The Marshall Islands supports international initiatives aimed at stemming the tide of climate change. In that context, we endorse the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the European Union-Pacific declaration; Japan's Cool Earth 50 Programme — which provides funding for adaptation and mitigation — and the Niue Declaration on Climate Change.

In further pursuit of greater guarantees of our territorial integrity, the Pacific island countries intend to introduce at this sixty-third session of the General Assembly a draft resolution calling for climate change to be addressed by the Security Council as nothing less than a security concern of the utmost serious nature.

The litmus test of the international community's commitment to those agreements should be reflected in its ability to provide sustainable financing for immediate and concrete adaptation programmes on the ground in small island States. It is one thing to produce agreements or resolutions; it is another to give them real meaning in concrete terms. Our commitments must show themselves in deeds, not in words alone.

On the scale that we have experienced over the past few months, the effect of rising fuel costs could bring everything to a standstill. Nevertheless, some in-country adjustments could be made, however painful and agonizing those might be. Insofar as climate change is concerned, however, we have no option. We can alter neither the size nor the height of our islands. They are our natural givens and we are stuck with them. Our own very survival is at stake. If sea levels rise by two metres, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands will be completely submerged under sea.

Thus, clearly the only alteration or adjustment that is possible is in the mindset and the moral, economic and political behaviour of the heaviest emitters of greenhouse gas. In summary, nothing is more glaring now than the fact that not only are those issues interrelated, but that their cross-cutting global character clearly demands an effective and immediate global response.

If wars have been waged to protect the rights of people to live in freedom and to safeguard their security, why will they not be waged to protect our right to survive the onslaught of climate change? Is the former more morally imperative than the latter? I urge the United Nations to elevate this threat — this nightmare — as justification for total war against climate change.

Recent positive developments, evidenced by the easing of tension and the improvement of relations between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan

have begun a new era of good will and hope for improved economic possibilities and political stability. In the context of those emerging dynamics now maturing between China and Taiwan, we see evidence of a mutual desire for dialogue and engagement in a process that can forge better relations and understanding. It is a development worthy of our respect, and it presents an excellent opportunity for the international community to encourage and strengthen that process.

In light of that, the Marshall Islands firmly believes that the time is now ripe for the 23 million people of Taiwan to be accorded full participation in the specialized agencies of the United Nations. This is a starting benchmark that is consistent with the principle of true universality.

As we continue to build a United Nations that better represents our global diversity, the Marshall Islands believes that membership in the Security Council should not be guarded as something that is overly sacred and untouchable. To do so would be to fail to keep in tandem with the principle of change. Council membership should instead be enlarged to reflect reality.

Japan's fitting aspirations to seek a permanent seat on the Security Council deserve favourable consideration. Japan is a world economic and industrial power, and its leadership and contribution to the United Nations is admirable and self-evident. We are confident that, as a permanent member of the Security Council, Japan will bring much that is good to the Council and to the United Nations as a whole.

Earlier this month, the United Sates marked the seventh anniversary of the tragic loss of lives resulting from barbaric acts carried out against the American people on 11 September 2001. That event threatened our collective security, prompting a response against acts of terrorism.

It is a matter of personal gratification for me to say that, over the past few decades, the special relationship between the Marshalls and the United States has continued to deepen with encouraging outcomes. I am proud to say that, in Afghanistan and Iraq, Marshallese young men and women have been participating actively in coalition forces as part of the United States armed services personnel, demonstrating our commitment to shared democratic ideals.

I take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to the United States for its continuing constructive role in our partnership under the Compact of Free Association, as well as for its leadership in advancing the cause of freedom around the world.

While the ideal of peace envisioned by the framers of the Charter of the United Nations 63 years ago is yet to be fully achieved, this should not be a cause for despair. People of goodwill everywhere have expressed their yearning for world peace. Today, we see vast increases in movements and organizations devoted to humanitarian work, empowerment of women and mobilization of youth. We see young and older nations engaged in matters of mutual concern. The United Nations has demonstrated our collective capacity for united action in a wide range of social and economic initiatives. It has affirmed our collective will to build a better future.

I believe the time has come for the United Nations to convoke an international convention where the fundamental principles and tenets of permanent world peace can be deliberated. Such a bold step will draw our attention more sharply to our true nature, to existing constructive forces and to the need for unifying social structures that can foster the establishment of a truly new world order, a global society animated by principles of social justice.

Today nothing is more urgent, more imperative and more important for this great institution than the establishment of a world peace that is permanent and that rests firmly on the bedrock of justice. And as we jointly undertake to gradually build that edifice of lasting international peace, let us draw our strength and take comfort in these words from the Gospel of Matthew: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God".

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Litokwa Tomeing, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, President of the Union of the Comoros

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Union of the Comoros.

Mr. Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, President of the Union of the Comoros, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, President of the Union of the Comoros, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sambi (*spoke in French*): We are extremely pleased to see Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann presiding over the sixty-third session of the General Assembly. I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of our Organization, for his commitment and active role in the service of the United Nations and for promoting its ideals of justice and peace.

The world today is faced with innumerable challenges. We who govern our respective countries bear a heavy responsibility. We must become increasingly concerned about the fate of our world. Why are we going through all these crises? Why are there so many centres of tension throughout the world? Why is there so much poverty and vulnerability in our universe? Why is terrorism spreading throughout the globe? Those are questions that must be addressed by each one of us, by our collective conscience and, first and foremost, by the United Nations, whose key purpose remains the defence of the ideals of peace, justice, solidarity and development.

Today's reality is quite different. Unfortunately, all those values are far from being solidly established. The most privileged nations must therefore show greater concern for the fate of some parts of the world and, in particular, for developing countries where violence, hunger, disease, injustice of all sorts conflicts and their consequences are facts of daily life.

The double crisis of food and energy, to mention but two, requires a new surge of solidarity at the international level. The crisis affects the entire world, but is felt particularly in developing countries. Furthermore, we firmly believe in multilateralism. That is why the reform of the major organs of the United Nations is required today to ensure greater firmness and effectiveness.

Last March, Operation Democracy in the Comoros put an end to a rebellion that had shaken the island of Anjouan and re-established constitutional legality. As I promised, free, transparent and democratic elections took place on the island last June, enabling us to complete the establishment of local Governments on the islands of the Union of the Comoros.

Therefore, I would like to pay heartfelt tribute to the African Union, the League of Arab States and the friendly countries of Tanzania, the Sudan, Libya, Morocco, Senegal, France and the United States of America, which have all supported us morally, materially or financially in our task to complete without bloodshed the delicate operation of freeing the island of Anjouan.

Firmly resolved to consolidate the renewed stability and in line with the commitment made to our partners, I have decided to organize as soon as possible an inter-Comorian conference to bring together political movements, local island Governments, civil society and the Comoros' partners. The conference will focus on the outstanding institutional issues that have long been a source of misunderstanding between the central Government and the federal entities. Initial contacts with the international community have been established to muster the support necessary to convene that national gathering which is required to improve the functioning of our national institutions.

Economic difficulties cannot allow us to lose sight of other major challenges, including environmental problems, which particularly affect the small island developing States, of which the Indian Ocean islands are a part. Thus, as head of State of the country currently holding the chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Commission, which has observer status at the United Nations, I would like to reiterate our subregional organization's desire to contribute to implementing the Mauritius Strategy. I also take this opportunity to thank the European Union for having agreed to finance a programme of support for the Indian Ocean Commission within the framework of the tenth European Development Fund as the Union's

contribution to the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy.

I appeal to the United Nations and to the international community to support the efforts of the Indian Ocean Commission to ensure the successful development and integration of its Member States and to pay particular attention to the issue of implementing the Mauritius Strategy.

Every individual and every nation aspires to justice, dignity and freedom. Those are the ideals of the United Nations system to which we must remain faithful if peace, security and development are to ensure the progress of humanity.

On the basis of respect for those values, allow me to inform this Assembly of the great concern of the people and the Government of the Comoros with regard to the issue of the Comorian island of Mayotte. I would like to note that, following talks undertaken with France on that issue since last September following my meeting with President Nicolas Sarkozy, I did not intend to raise the issue at this session. The high-level working group that was set up for that purpose on the initiative of the French President provides, I believe, an ideal bilateral framework to study all aspects of the issue.

However, the intention recently declared by the French authorities to organize a referendum in 2009 with a view to transforming Mayotte into a French department forces me to raise the issue here. It will be agreed that such a decision, coming at a moment when discussions are under way between the two parties, will not favour an open and constructive dialogue. Therefore, in order to throw further light on the justification of the Comorian claim to the island of Mayotte, allow me to set out certain important facts that need to be taken into account when we analyse the issue.

Throughout the years of French colonization, the Comorian archipelago, comprised of the four islands of Anjouan, Grande Comore, Mayotte and Mohéli, was a single physical, geographical, religious, cultural and linguistic entity. Under French domestic law, and ever since Anjouan, Grande Comore and Mohéli were established as a French protectorate, they were combined with Mayotte to form a single territory.

The first text on that issue was the decree of September 1889. Since then, the political and administrative unity of the Comoros archipelago has never been questioned in any document, despite the plethora of provisions adopted with regard to the Comoros. I would refer, for example, to the law of 9 May 1946, the law of 17 April 1952, the decree of 22 July 1957, the law of 22 December 1961 and the law of 3 January 1968.

Thus, each time the French legislature or regulatory authority has acted, it has done so by considering the archipelago of the Comoros to constitute a single territory.

It is clear then that the French Republic has never called into question the territorial unity of the archipelago of the Comoros, while international public opinion has consistently considered that the four islands of the Comoros form a single territory, subject to the French Republic and administered most recently under the provisions of article 72 and following the French Constitution.

It was in that spirit that at the end of 1974 we implemented the procedure provided for by article 53 of the French Constitution, which aimed to gain the support of those affected by the accession to independence of the archipelago of the Comoros.

In accordance with the law of 23 November 1974, the people of the archipelago of the Comoros were invited to vote on whether they wished the territory to gain independence.

In all the islands, namely, in Anjouan, Mohéli, Mayotte and Grande Comore, on 22 December 1974, overall a positive answer was given to the question posed.

The question was put to the Comorian people as a single, indivisible people and over 96 per cent voted in favour of independence, in accordance with the law based on article 53 of the French Constitution.

However, at that time the French Parliament, rather than simply ratifying that decision of the people, wanted to draw up another law organizing another referendum on the pretext that in Mayotte about 60 per cent had voted against.

But the question had been put to the Comorian people, comprising the population of Mayotte, Anjouan, Mohéli and Grande Comore, and the result translated into overall terms as that did not in any way affect the letter and spirit of the law.

Faced with the unwillingness of the French Parliament at that time to recognize the irrevocable verdict of the Comorian people, the late President Ahmed Abdallah Abdérémane, with the backing of the Comorian people, unilaterally declared the independence of the Comoros on 6 July 1975.

Looking beyond such measures, which come under French domestic law, I should like to stress the principle of the inviolability, under international law, of borders inherited from the colonial era and thereby to make it clear that the Comorian demand is indeed in conformity with the law.

Lastly, I would like to remind the Assembly that the Comoros, comprising Mayotte, Anjouan, Mohéli and Grande Comore, was admitted into this prestigious Organization on 12 November 1975, as demarcated by its borders, without France showing its opposition to that admission.

Today, there are good grounds for our great concern over France's official statements regarding the departmentalization of the Comorian island of Mayotte. Those statements are not in keeping with the principles of justice, fairness and respect for international law, for which the great country of France is known.

For that reason, my country as of now considers any ballot organized on the question of making the Comorian island Mayotte a department to be null and void. Such are the facts — and the facts speak for themselves.

However, today the reality is that France is in Mayotte notwithstanding the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and all the other international organizations that have been regularly seized of the matter. Against that background, I have entered into talks with the French President, His Excellency Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, who has shown a willingness to find a solution to the problem.

It may therefore be hoped that that legitimate claim of the Comoros to the island of Mayotte will soon have a happy outcome. I am particularly confident of that, because many outstanding problems throughout the world have been settled and others are on the way to being settled since His Excellency President Nicolas Sarkozy assumed France's highest office.

Let me take this opportunity to make a solemn appeal to the French Government to strive to preserve a climate conducive to a committed dialogue, which has our support and which, in order to result in a negotiated settlement will need to take into account the concern of the Comoros that its national unity and territorial integrity be respected.

Moreover, I urge the international community to help to reconcile the views of the two parties along those lines, because the unity of the four islands of the Comoros, as well as peace and lasting stability for the archipelago, are a prerequisite for its harmonious development.

In conclusion, may I express the sincere thanks of the Comorian delegation to all the American authorities for the particularly warm welcome and the good arrangements made to ensure the success of this sixty-third session of the General Assembly.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Union of the Comoros for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, President of the Union of the Comoros, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, on behalf of the people of Equatorial Guinea and the delegation with me today, I should like to congratulate Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann on his fitting election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. His election bears

witness to the trust and credibility with which all States Members of the United Nations view the sister Republic of Nicaragua. We wish him every success and assure him of our full cooperation during his time in office.

I would also like to pay tribute to the outgoing President, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for the excellent work he carried out at a crucial time in the history of the United Nations.

The sixty-third session allows us a new opportunity to share our views on the common concerns of all peoples in the world. We would like to say how pleased we are to see that the agenda of this annual debate includes subjects such as the democratization of the United Nations system, including the necessary reforms in the functioning of the Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions; funding for the development of Africa; the food crisis and world hunger; climate change; human security as part of international peace and security; and the fight against terrorism.

The world harboured the hope that after the cold war mankind would achieve peace and live more harmoniously together in greater solidarity. However, we are extremely saddened to note the differences separating the rich from the poor countries, causing hunger, poverty, war and destabilization. In other words, today we are facing new challenges that jeopardize the budding institutions of developing countries in many ways.

For that reason, it is necessary to adopt mechanisms and strategies that enable us to ensure that our experiences can provide a bridge to a new form of cooperation among peoples. Indeed, in the six decades of the existence of the United Nations, we have seen that only the establishment of a new, more open and respectful global framework for cooperation will lead to the stability, peace and progress of all nations.

We have seen that the use of force by the strong has not only failed to solve the problems affecting the people of the world today, but has made them worse. We know from experience that conflicts and threats to world peace arise from a patent lack of dialogue among the countries making up the international community. Not only do many peoples and nations continue to face old conflicts, but every day new tensions and threats to world peace emerge.

In addition to those challenges are the issues that are the focus of our debate, such as injustice, poverty, the energy and food crises, climate change, inequality and poor access to the education, health care and new technologies needed for poor countries to develop.

Thus, Equatorial Guinea believes it appropriate that the new strategy the world needs today must start not only with the reform of our multilateral cooperation institutions, but also with a change in the mentality and behaviour of those who today hold economic power, so as to achieve a manifestation of democracy that fosters dialogue and cooperation among peoples.

In the recent past, our efforts to bring about a better world have been based on the Millennium Development Goals, which were intended to strengthen international cooperation towards universal and sustainable development. Achieving those Goals requires, inter alia, the reform of the world economic system, based on respect for different development models, so that each may choose what is most historically, politically, socially and culturally fitting.

Clearly, that troubled global situation affects all countries to different degrees and with varying impact. In that regard, the African continent is the most vulnerable in terms of economic and social development, and it is not surprising that its peoples are more affected by the widespread crisis threatening the world.

That which is presented to us today as a world food crisis is not merely temporary but is one of the many paradoxes of our time. For it seems inconceivable that in an era of abundance the underdeveloped countries of the South are confronted by a deficit in a right so crucial to human beings, namely, the right to food. Statistics published by the Food and Agriculture Organization indicate that nearly 900 million men, women and children suffer from hunger, with almost 80 per cent of them living in developing countries.

The supposed food crisis and other current phenomena in our globalized world are the result of the impact of the neoliberal policies that have been applied on a global scale for more than four decades. I am speaking in particular about the prescriptions advanced by institutions of the international commercial and financial system, namely, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade

Organization. In fact, they act as the voice of their masters in erecting discriminatory barriers that impede our ability to produce and trade.

One of the consequences of the food crisis has been the no-holds-barred liberalization of trade imposed by those institutions. That has permitted the flooding of African markets with highly subsidized food products, which is destroying agriculture in our countries. In that regard, Africa today is a continent that produces and exports things that it itself does not consume, while at the same time it imports from the countries of the North things that it could produce for its own use but does not.

If there is any good in the food crisis it is the fact that none of the countries of the South, and especially those in Africa, has any interest in continuing to depend upon food imports in order to ensure the survival of its citizens, either as food aid or through an unfair trading system. In that connection, what Africa needs today is development based on solidarity and the strengthening of its socio-economic fabric. A large part of Africa's fertile land is still not cultivated, but statistics on Africa's productivity are among the lowest in the world. That is due to the exodus from the countryside and the few incentives available to farmers because of the high cost of agricultural inputs and the relative prices of agricultural products on the international market.

With regard to the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the delay in its implementation, Equatorial Guinea would like to propose the establishment of an international steering committee made up of experts from both donor and African countries. The purpose of the committee would be to identify mechanisms and projects that could contribute to the economic integration of African countries. The committee would also be in charge of implementing projects and programmes at the continental, regional and subregional levels, including the programme to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases endemic in Africa; identifying and financing of energy resources in order to electrify countries in landlocked regions; building a trans-African network of roads and railways so that countries that are enclaves and without access to the sea can transport their goods; launching a satellite that ensures communications for Africa; establishing an African university to train our human resources; establishing industries in countries experiencing emigration to developed countries in order to create jobs for their workforce; and granting low-interest loans in order to promote development in Africa's least favoured countries.

I should like to conclude my statement by recalling the commitment of the international community to preserve the environment and protect ecosystems that have an impact on climate change, which today poses a threat to humankind. Equatorial Guinea is among the countries of equatorial Africa making great efforts to preserve the forest ecosystems of the Congo River basin, which, along with the Amazon, serves as the lungs of humankind.

Moreover, Equatorial Guinea would like to reiterate its commitment to combating international terrorism and organized crime in all their forms and manifestations.

With regard to national policy, Equatorial Guinea is experiencing an unprecedented period of freedom and development. Our people are flourishing and developing in an atmosphere of peace, democracy and stability. We look forward to a future of well-being and justice for all our citizens.

From this podium, I would like to reiterate the commitment of my Government to promote and protect human rights. We do not need anyone to give us lessons about elections, or to attempt to usurp the sovereign will of the people of Equatorial Guinea.

Equatorial Guinea is proud to be part of the United Nations. We believe this universal Organization is today, and will continue to be, the sole option for strengthening peace and stability and for achieving development, to which we all aspire.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Kiribati.

Mr. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Tong (Kiribati): I bring warm greetings from the Government and the people of the Republic of Kiribati, on whose behalf I am honoured to address this body this morning. Let me, at the outset, congratulate Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I am confident that he will provide efficient and effective leadership in guiding this session towards a productive and concrete outcome for all. I would also like to thank his predecessor for his able and effective leadership during the past session. I should also like to acknowledge the election of Solomon Islands as a Vice-President of the General Assembly at this session. We are indeed very proud to have a Pacific brother in that position.

Every year, we come together as citizens of the international community to reflect on and discuss possible solutions to the daunting challenges that continue to face us individually and collectively. Climate change and sea level rise, environmental protection, food and fuel price increases and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are among the challenges that I wish to focus on, in the interests of time and brevity.

For many years, we have tirelessly appealed to the Organization to do something about climate change and to provide solutions for those seriously affected by its detrimental impact, especially those whose very existence is being threatened. Those appeals have failed to produce practical solutions for people living in low-lying small island developing States like Kiribati. While the members of the international community continue to point fingers at each other regarding responsibility for and leadership on that issue, our people continue to experience the impact of climate change and sea-level rise and practical solutions continue to elude us.

The science on climate change is irrefutable. The fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projected an increase in sea level of 0.4 metres within this century. While that may sound minimal to most, it is quite alarming for low-lying small island developing States like Kiribati, whose elevation is no more than two metres above sea level and whose main source of water is underground aquifers. Before our islands are inundated by the rising sea, saltwater intrusion into our freshwater lens will render the islands uninhabitable. With the projected sea-level rise, Kiribati could be looking at 50 to 60 years before that happens. Presented with those findings, we have had to adopt a pragmatic approach and to formulate options for our people. We do so with a great deal of regret and a deep sense of frustration.

Mitigation and adaptation strategies are and will continue to be integral components of our response to climate change. It would indeed be naive to suggest otherwise. Those strategies provide only short- and medium-term solutions. Ultimately, low-lying island countries like Kiribati will have to face up to the reality of their islands being unable to support life and to plan accordingly beyond existing adaptation strategies.

Kiribati is not a major emitter of greenhouse gases. Its mitigation efforts would therefore have an insignificant impact on the global climate change situation. Nevertheless, we will do our part and explore appropriate renewable and efficient energy technologies, as well as promote replanting in our islands.

While we also require adaptation strategies, our adaptation options are extremely limited, particularly given the nature of our islands. We are a country of low-lying coral atolls, with most islands rising no more than two metres above sea level. Coastal protection through seawall construction is the main adaptation measure currently being undertaken by the Government, but it is limited to the protection of public infrastructure. We simply do not have the resources to extend protection to private properties and assets. Adaptation measures, such as moving inland and to higher ground, are impractical for us. We cannot move further inland due to the narrowness of our islands, nor is there any higher ground to which we can escape from the rising seas.

It is encouraging indeed to follow the emergence of many climate change initiatives. It gives us hope to see that humankind is beginning to do the right thing. We have been following developments on those fronts. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Australia's commitment to the Kyoto Protocol and its

recent announcement of its climate change programme. New Zealand has also announced its pledge to increase financial support for climate change. We also welcome Japan's Cool Earth Promotion Programme and the European Union's Global Climate Change Alliance, which support practical measures to address the impacts of climate change in the Pacific island countries.

The report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change also states that the concentration of greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere will continue the momentum of climate change, regardless of any substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation efforts. That effectively means that low-lying small island developing countries like Kiribati are on the frontlines of the climate change calamity. Mitigation efforts therefore will not be able to reverse our situation — a situation that we have recently acknowledged and to which my Government has provided a long-term strategy for our people's future and survival.

At the previous session of the Assembly, a question was raised regarding what we are to do when people start fleeing their countries, not because of political persecution but because of environmental catastrophe. That is the question that I want to put forward as a challenge to this session, and to which I wish to provide a possible answer, at least from the perspective of a country whose very existence is under serious threat. The relocation of the 100,000 people of Kiribati, for example, is not something that can be done overnight. It requires long-term forward planning. The sooner we act, the less stressful and the less painful it will be for all concerned.

That is why my Government has developed a long-term merit-based relocation strategy as an option for our people. As leaders, it is indeed our duty to the people we serve to prepare them for the worst-case scenario. The strategy involves upgrading the skills of our people to make them competitive and marketable in international labour markets. We want to target labour markets where skills or labour gaps exist and provide labour for them. We believe that offers a win-win situation for all. We will be able to provide countries with labour and those countries will be able to provide potential new homes for our people. The strategy provides our people with an option so that when they choose to migrate, they will migrate on merit and with dignity. We hope that they will be received by their adoptive countries not as burdens or refugees, but as worthwhile members of the community with something to contribute.

We have already started implementing that strategy and we are indeed encouraged by, and grateful for, the support for that approach among our regional partners in the Pacific. Under its Pacific Access Category Scheme, New Zealand randomly picks a certain number of people from certain Pacific island countries, including Kiribati, to migrate to New Zealand every year. Recently, Australia launched the Australia Pacific Technical College, which aims at training Pacific people with Australian standard qualifications that will allow them to access regional and international labour markets. The bilateral Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative is another example of a programme that supports that long-term strategy. We welcome them all indeed.

At the regional level, in August, the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum adopted the Niue Declaration on Climate Change. That is a reflection of our concerted regional efforts to respond to the adverse impacts of climate change, which have been severely felt across our region. As the first-ever high-level climate document in our part of the world, the Declaration is indeed a milestone. It calls for collective efforts to fight the growing threat posed by climate change to many aspects of our lives and to our future as nations.

At the international level, we have been following closely the issues currently taking precedence on the United Nations agenda. It is indeed most gratifying to note that climate change is finally being given due recognition as a security issue. We welcome that development, as we believe that it is time the United Nations focused its attention on the human dimension of climate change. Discussions about carbon trading, the post-Kyoto Protocol era and even concerns over the future of polar bears have been, or are being, held. We welcome those discussions but, at the same time, we wish to express our deep concern that there has never been any discussion of the fate of humans, whose very existence is being seriously undermined by climate change.

That is the challenge that I propose that this body, the President and the Secretary-General address during this session. In that connection, I commend to the Assembly the draft resolution on climate change as a security issue and a threat to international peace and

security. My colleagues from the Pacific have already alluded to it, and I commend them for their support. I also wish to applaud the excellent efforts by our Pacific ambassadors in New York, as well as their leadership on the draft resolution. I am also grateful to those who have supported the draft resolution so far, as well as those who we hope will do so in the future. We in the Pacific have been strong supporters of the fight against terrorism. We now turn to those with whom we have partnered in the fight against terrorism to partner with us in our fight against climate change.

Kiribati is proud to be home to the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, the largest marine protected area in the world. That was the result of a collaborative effort and partnership between Kiribati, the New England Aquarium and Conservation International. The Phoenix Islands Protected Area covers an area of around 410,500 square kilometres, making it, for now, the planet's largest marine protected area. The Area covers over 11 per cent of our extensive exclusive economic zone of over 3 million square kilometres, while the land comprising the Area is over 3.5 per cent of the total land mass of Kiribati.

The Phoenix Islands are some of the most isolated islands on Earth and are largely untouched by man. In 2002, the countries of the world made a commitment to significantly reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Our declaration of the Area is in part a contribution towards meeting that target, as well as a statement by which we are saying that sacrifices must and can be made.

The preservation of those islands and the surrounding ocean is our gift to humankind, of which we are a part. Even now, as we confront the possibility that our islands will become uninhabitable within the century due to the rising sea levels, we recognize the value of protecting something that we believe to be the common heritage of us all. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable support and contribution of the New England Aquarium and Conservation International, our partners in this endeavour. We invite Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, members of the private sector and individuals to join us in this worthwhile and ambitious initiative.

The recent hike in food and fuel prices is being felt by all, but more acutely by those living in drought-prone, resource-poor and infertile small island developing States like Kiribati, who as a consequence depend highly on imported food. Our isolation from major markets means that the cost of transporting food items to our country is becoming more and more expensive. In addition, the cost of providing basic services to our people, who live on widely scattered islands, is also becoming a real challenge for all of us in similar situations.

We acknowledge the ability of certain members of the Organization to address this global challenge. We appeal to them to assist the most vulnerable members, such as Kiribati, with their food and energy security strategies. In that regard, we acknowledge with appreciation the assistance provided to our energy security strategy by our development partners, including Japan and Korea.

With regard to graduation from the list of least developed countries, the Committee for Development Policy will meet early next year to prepare the 2009 review of countries that are deemed eligible to graduate under the methodology and indicators of the United Nations. Kiribati is one of three least developed countries of the Pacific — the others being Tuvalu and Vanuatu — being considered for graduation. We believe there are pertinent issues that warrant proper consideration by the United Nations with regard to this process.

One is the issue of the extreme economic vulnerability of small island developing States. Current indicators focus on improved performance on per capita income and human assets. Due consideration should be accorded to the special economic vulnerability to external shocks such as rising world food and fuel prices.

While it is not currently a graduation indicator, we believe that environmental vulnerability should be taken into account when considering the cases of small island developing States such as Kiribati, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, which are among the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change and extreme weather events — which, in turn, pose major challenges to their sustainable development efforts.

In that connection, I wish to commend my Pacific colleagues who have advocated the need to reform the application of the rule of graduation. We reiterate that call and urge the United Nations to reconsider the graduation rule in the light of the special economic

situation and the vulnerability of those island nations to climate change and external shocks.

On the Millennium Development Goals, many of my fellow members will be familiar with, and share, the genuine desire to promote the development aspirations of our peoples, which is our priority. Even with our limited capacity, we are committed to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. In that regard, I am pleased to report that Kiribati has launched its first report on the Millennium Development Goals.

The report outlines weaknesses and strengths in the overall development efforts and in meeting the MDGs. We believe that we are on track with our progress on most of the Goals, but we also admit that we are behind on some of them. The main reason for that is the lack of data to measure our progress so far and our limited resources to implement strategies aimed at achieving the Goals. We will continue to exert efforts in meeting the targeted Goals by 2015. At this time, I wish to express our deep appreciation to our development partners, who have accompanied us on this journey and have contributed meaningfully to the realization of our development aspirations.

While we commend the United Nations for the many initiatives put forward in addressing the needs of its Members, it is regrettable that it has continued to deny the 23 million people of Taiwan equal rights as international citizens to participate fully in world affairs. We believe that Taiwan has made an active contribution that has enriched the lives of many in their collaborative efforts in building and securing international peace and security. We believe that the people of Taiwan should be accorded the same fundamental right to participate as fellow citizens of the international community and to be allowed to contribute meaningfully in various sectors of the Organization's activities.

The challenges that we face are global in nature, and therefore require global solutions. We call upon the United Nations to take the lead in addressing those challenges, especially in funding, supporting and facilitating the implementation of practical solutions to the security challenges that threaten the very existence of peoples and nations, which in turn poses a threat to international peace and security.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Kiribati for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Fradique Bandeira Melo de Menezes, President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe.

Mr. Fradique Bandeira Melo de Menezes, President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Fradique Bandeira Melo de Menezes, President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President De Menezes (*spoke in Portuguese; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): I believe that nearly everything has already been said here since the beginning of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly. Some were things that we Africans wanted to hear and some we could have done without. But I have come to New York once again to join other heads of State who are concerned with the state of the planet, which faces armed conflicts, environmental catastrophes — some naturally occurring and some the result of thoughtless and selfish behaviour and attitudes of some among us — as well as multiple financial crises, including extreme increases in the price of oil and basic food products.

On behalf of the people of the islands of Sao Tome and Principe, I should like to congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session and to wish him every success. I am certain that the themes he has put forward for discussion at this session are a reflection of his concern about the various international problems currently affecting the world. I would dare say that we are doubly blessed by his qualities as a diplomat, which are well known, and as a priest. Allow me also to take this opportunity to

thank and commend his predecessor for a job well done.

The report (A/63/1) of the Secretary-General to the Assembly exhaustively describes the world in which we live and reflects the major concerns of Member States while providing guidance on how to resolve them. I believe it to be an important working document that deserves the closest attention from Member States.

The recent upheavals and conflicts that the world has experienced are proof of the fragility of the current system of international relations. That makes it necessary for the world's main political actors to engage in permanent dialogue to find lasting solutions that will make it possible for nations and peoples to concentrate on social and economic development issues.

With regard to development, I would like to commend the Secretary-General on his selection of themes for the high-level meetings, the first of which took place the day before the opening of the general debate and the second of which is taking place today. We hope that those who, during the first three days of the general debate, have reaffirmed their determination to continue their solidarity towards Africa will translate the intentions expressed here into action.

I need not reiterate my country's position with regard to chronic unresolved conflicts, especially the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian issue, the perennial latent conflict in our subregion that is taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the humanitarian situation in Darfur and its impact.

Our attention and available resources are focused on efforts to eradicate poverty, ensure food security and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Despite the enormous efforts of my people and the hardships they have suffered, my country will not be able to achieve all the Goals by 2015. The food crisis, the financial crisis and the constraints of insufficient aid linked to inadequate processes are all contributing to deteriorating prospects. Paradoxically, the number of poor people is increasing rather than decreasing. We are continuing our efforts to reverse that situation, by example, by greatly increasing microcredit loans in the agriculture and fisheries sectors in an attempt to ensure some measure of food security.

However, despite the relatively unfavourable overall environment, there have been some success stories. For example, in recent years, Sao Tome and Principe has made great progress with regard to child mortality indicators; we are certain that we will achieve the targets established in the MDGs. We have also made progress in the area of education. With adequate support from our partners and the international community, we will be able to achieve the relevant targets set out in the MDGs.

According to data published in 2007, the incidence of HIV/AIDS infection has increased in my country. We have attempted to provide free or subsidized antiretroviral treatment for all, with help from the Federative Republic of Brazil. We are also carrying out an aggressive policy to educate people in order to prevent the disease and promote safe sexual practices.

Sao Tome and Principe is an archipelago that includes three mountainous islands. Despite our mountainous terrain, however, our people are increasingly concerned about the advancing sea at high tide. According to records, no waves higher than three metres have broken on our shores in the past 110 years. However, giant waves have begun to wash over our coastal highways in the past 10 years, temporarily cutting off certain regions of our country. I cannot overemphasize the strong appeal I made from this rostrum in the past to those who are primarily responsible for the global warming that afflicts the planet, namely, that they address this phenomenon and the means to mitigate its effects with much greater seriousness.

In his statement at the opening of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly (see A/63/PV.1), the Assembly President said that love was the greatest need in today's world and that the selfishness of some has led to the current situation. This may perhaps be considered overly simplistic coming from the mouth of a head of State, but I believe that that is precisely the core of the problem. Our Governments, diplomats and politicians rarely think in such terms. No people chooses to be poor. Being poor does not imply that we are less intelligent or lazier than others. It all has to do with the opportunities available at the time of birth, as well as to the solidarity and compassion one encounters thereafter — when these are not empty words. Yes, we must re-establish generosity and solidarity among human beings.

An example of that is the fact that there was a decrease of more than 95 per cent in the number of cases of malaria recorded in Sao Tome and Principe in 2007. As a result, we expect that the disease will soon be eradicated from our country through an ongoing control programme. For the first time in centuries, as confirmed by the most recent report of the World Health Organization on the state of the world's health, malaria is not the main cause of child mortality and morbidity among the people of my country. That has been possible thanks to the Republic of China on Taiwan.

Speaking of solidarity and Taiwan, once again from this rostrum, I would like to appeal to the conscience of each and every member to consider the fate to which 23 million Taiwanese have been relegated. Will the community of nations represented here continue to ignore the existence of a population comprising more than 23 million people? I must remind the Assembly that the Republic of China on Taiwan is a country with a vibrant democracy and an enviable economic and technological record that has served as a development model for the global economy. On 20 May 2008, we were pleased to see the inauguration of the new President of that friendly country. We paid close attention to his inaugural address, which was a genuine call for peace and good relations in the Taiwan Strait.

Also regarding the lack of solidarity in the world, the embargo against Cuba is another cause for concern that requires our urgent attention. That relic from the past must be lifted on an urgent basis, especially in the aftermath of the destruction caused by the two successive hurricanes that recently struck that friendly nation. The United States Administration has a golden opportunity to demonstrate to the world that the statements of its leaders are not just rhetorical exercises.

At the same time, I would like to make it very clear that Sao Tome and Principe is a tenacious defender of the measures to combat international terrorism and to prevent the further loss of innocent life.

Development strengthens diplomacy and security, reduces threats against our collective security and produces peaceful, stable and prosperous societies. That must be the focus of our efforts. I should therefore, in conclusion, reiterate what I said at the outset: we must all be less selfish and care more about each other, rather than just ourselves.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Fradique Bandeira Melo de Menezes, President of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Koroma: It is an honour for me, as President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, to deliver my first speech to this Assembly. I wish to congratulate Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann on his assumption of the high office of President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, and to assure him of Sierra Leone's support and cooperation as he undertakes the challenging responsibility of presiding over our deliberations during this session. I should also like to express my gratitude to his predecessor for the efficient way in which he guided the Assembly during its last session.

The sacred duty of this Organization to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war was tested in fire in Sierra Leone, but today my country demonstrates what the United Nations can achieve when its Members work closely together. The people of Sierra Leone know the value and relevance of the United Nations and appreciate its continuing support as we reconstruct our society from war to peace and work with determination to build a better future.

The theme for this general debate, "The impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger in the world as well as the need to democratize the United Nations", is important and timely. Africa has a disproportionate share of the world's poor and hungry, and the need for urgent and concerted action is compelling. The rising cost of food has had a negative impact on our resources and poses a threat to our national stability and the stability of other countries in West Africa. It is vital that Africa increase food productivity and achieve food self-sufficiency. African farmers need to adopt higher-yielding land practices, with increased use of seeds, fertilizers and irrigation.

In that connection, we welcome the work of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, chaired by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The Alliance recognizes that massive investment in agriculture is the key to a long-term solution to the continent's food crisis. That will enable Africans to grow enough of their own food and become less dependent on handouts from donors. Sierra Leone, like many other countries in Africa, is suitably positioned to benefit from such investment because of its vast arable land, abundant water resources and the fact that over 70 per cent of its population is engaged in farming or farming-related activities. If that problem is going to be resolved, it is essential to end the agricultural subsidies and trade barriers that impoverish African farmers.

I have had the privilege to coordinate the African Union committee of 10 heads of State and Government charged with the mandate to promote the African Common Position on the Reform of the United Nations. In that capacity, and as Head of State of Sierra Leone, I welcome the theme "the need to democratize the United Nations" as part of this year's work of the General Assembly.

The need to democratize and reform the Organization is of vital importance. However, reform is not an end in itself but a means to an end. We support a strong and effective United Nations that can meet the ever-increasing and complex array of challenges in the twenty-first century. We are convinced that a more representative and effective United Nations will strengthen the loyalty and commitment of Member States and make the Organization more responsive to the needs of our time.

It should be recognized that reform efforts have achieved some modest successes. However, one of the most critical and urgent issues on our current reform agenda — reform of the Security Council — remains unresolved. We need to make the Security Council more representative of today's realities. The current composition of the Security Council contradicts basic principles of democratic representation. Africa has outlined its collective position in the Ezulwini Consensus. Africa will negotiate in good faith, and we expect others to do the same in the best interest of the Organization. The status quo is not an option. Africa, with 53 countries constituting about a quarter of the United Nations membership, deserves permanent representation in the Security Council. We believe that the Security Council should be enlarged sooner rather than later.

The United Nations has had an important role in global peace and the development of justice. Sierra Leone's peace and stability are due largely to United Nations peacekeeping, a visible and an important aspect of the Organization's work. The Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Fund and other United Nations agencies are helping us in critical ways to achieve our development priorities and to meet the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction.

The United Nations-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have made extraordinary contributions to establishing the rule of law and fighting against impunity so that the people of Sierra Leone can put their tragic past behind them and look forward to the future. Without reconciliation, tolerance and the rule of law, there will be no true and lasting peace.

The Special Court has established legal principles that will endure beyond its anticipated closure in 2010. I want to commend the efforts of the Special Court to engage both my Government and the international justice community in making preparations for any residual issues that might remain following its closure. The facilities of the Special Court in the heart of our historic capital, Freetown, will be inherited by Sierra Leone, and we will explore the best possible use for them.

In recent years, Sierra Leone has made real progress in consolidating democracy and good governance by conducting successive free, fair and non-violent presidential, parliamentary and local Government elections. We are on the right path. On behalf of all Sierra Leoneans, I would like to thank

members of the international community for their invaluable contribution to our electoral process, and particularly for their logistical and technical support that enabled the various institutions to perform their respective tasks.

But we are the first to acknowledge that much more needs to be done to achieve sustainable peace and development. War and deadly conflicts have social and economic consequences long after the fighting has ended. A peaceful country requires more than the absence of war. Development remains the foremost need of all Sierra Leoneans. Moreover, it is the foundation of security, and it makes political rights meaningful.

One can be secure only if one has food, shelter, clean water and protection from disease. That is why the monumental task of poverty eradication is one of the national priorities of my Government. My Government is completing a second-generation poverty reduction strategy to guide us in the process. We have also developed a comprehensive strategy for the nation's development over the next five years, called the Agenda for Change. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are also central to our work. Despite the enormous difficulties on the development front and in achieving the MDGs, we are resolved to improve the lives of our people and to respond constructively to their needs and aspirations. International support remains crucial, however, if we are to consolidate hard-won gains. It is our hope that the United Nations and other development partners will continue to be our steadfast allies in our ongoing struggle for economic progress and development.

The mission of the United Nations — to serve the cause of peace, to advance development and to protect the human rights of all — is more important than ever. The United Nations is a unique forum where the weak and the strong, the poor and the prosperous can have their voices heard. Sierra Leone reaffirms its commitment to the ideals and principles of the United Nations and will continue to be a constructive partner and member of this Organization.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Iraq.

Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Talabani (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to extend my congratulations to Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I wish him success in his great work responsibilities and projects. I hope he will be able to work for the interests of States Members of the United Nations. I would like also to thank his predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for presiding over the last session of the General Assembly.

It is with honour and pleasure at this major international gathering that I convey greetings from the Government of the Republic of Iraq and its people. Iraq's former regime left behind security and political conditions that had become a drain on the energy of the Iraqi people and that led to a deterioration of the country's economy. Those conditions also left behind significant environmental and social damage. The foreign policy of the former regime and its domestic practices dragged the country into futile wars, leaving behind millions of victims and the destruction of economic and state institutions.

While the Iraqi people are building a new federal State on the basis of democracy, pluralism and the peaceful distribution of power, they have been subject to and affected by a series of terrorist acts targeting all Iraqis, be they Sunni or Shia Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen or Chaldo-Assyrians, and attempts to ignite sectarian strife, undermine the political process and stability of the country, and return Iraq to the days of tyranny, backwardness, oppression and dictatorship.

Terrorism is a blind danger that threatens everyone. At a time when the Iraqi people call upon the representatives of their elected national Government to combat the remnants of terrorism, they call upon the international community, and in particular neighbouring countries, to support Iraq in its efforts to suppress violence and terrorism and to promote peace, security and stability. That would have a positive impact on the stability and security of the region and on the interests of its peoples and of the international community as a whole.

The acts of terrorism committed by the enemies of freedom will not discourage our people from creating a new democratic experience. Our people have paid a heavy price for embracing that experience. Our position requires the support and assistance of countries around the world if we are to build a modern nation that ensures justice, equality, strengthened the rule of law, respect for human rights and participation by women in all spheres of life.

The Iraqi Government continues to impose the rule of law throughout Iraq with determination, disarming militias and armed gangs, fighting sectarian conflict and building State institutions on the basis of national unity.

The initiative for reconciliation and national dialogue launched by the Iraqi Government among the various stakeholders in Iraq — be they Muslim, non-Muslim, Arab, Kurd, Turkmen, Chaldo-Assyrian, Shiite or Sunni — draws its strength from the heritage of the Iraqi people, which has rendered great services to humanity. Iraqis have coexisted in a spirit of fraternity, love and tolerance since the dawn of history. Their religious, sectarian and national diversity has been a driving force in promoting national unity. National reconciliation is a shared responsibility between political forces, decision makers, religious scholars, intellectuals, civil society organizations and all active actors in Iraq.

Progress has been achieved on the ground thanks to ongoing national reconciliation activities that have brought about the end of sectarian killings and an improvement in the security situation, along with the return of thousands of displaced families to their homes, the launch of construction projects and the provision of services to citizens.

The proper preparation and continuous training given to security and military forces have greatly impacted their efficiency and capacity to respond to criminal gangs, militias and terrorist organizations. Those forces conducted successful security campaigns to enforce the law in Baghdad and thereby eliminated most of the armed militias and gangs and terrorist groups, which greatly helped us to restore security and stability. We also undertook similar and successful campaigns in Basra, Mosul, Diyala and other provinces.

The Iraqi security forces have taken over security duties from the multinational forces in many of Iraq's provinces, most recently in Anbar. We are currently assuming full responsibility for defending and preserving the democratic achievements of our people. The Government is aware that those efforts have not fully attained our objectives and aspirations and that there is still much work ahead of us before we achieve the stable and prosperous Iraq to which we all aspire. Therefore, we call upon the international community to support and assist Iraq in achieving those noble goals. We are determined to assume responsibility for all security tasks by the end of this year.

The national unity Government has sought to improve Iraq's relations with other countries throughout the world, in particular our neighbours, in accordance with the principles set out in the new Iraqi Constitution. It calls for the establishment of good relations with neighbouring countries that share our interests, on the basis of non-interference in their internal affairs, diplomacy, direct dialogue and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Therefore, Iraq is no longer a threat to international peace and security. We call on the international community to ensure that Iraq is no longer subjected to action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, putting an end to all Security Council measures against Iraq, including with regard to compensation.

We thank our neighbouring countries for participating in three large regional conferences, the most recent of which was held in Kuwait in April 2008. We also thank them for their continued cooperation and coordination to support the efforts of the Government and the people of Iraq to restore peace, stability and prosperity, by promoting ongoing dialogue in the areas of national reconciliation, combating terrorism, strengthening the rule of law and increasing political participation. Those conferences have given participants the opportunity to reaffirm their commitments to Iraq's territorial integrity, unity, full

sovereignty and independence and to non-interference in its internal affairs, as well as their pledges to honour those commitments. We are currently preparing for a forthcoming meeting among Iraq's neighbours to be held in Baghdad, at which we will be able to set forth guiding principles for future positive cooperative efforts in the political, economical and security fields.

Thanks to Iraq's new policies, our country has become a meeting place for dialogue for regional and international adversaries. We would like to enhance that positive role and to adopt a policy that will help to further reduce tensions and wars not only in the region but also in the world at large. This year, senior Iraqi officials made important high-level visits to neighbouring countries and other nations. Iraq was also visited by senior officials from the region, and their consultations promoted balanced and stable political and economic policies that increased the Arab diplomatic presence in Iraq. Therefore, we call on all nations — especially given the great improvement in our security situation — to open or reopen diplomatic missions and to enhance existing ones by increasing the level of their representation.

Furthermore, in its foreign policy, Iraq has made it a priority to enhance its role in the international community through effective participation in meetings and conferences held by United Nations agencies and funds on various international issues. Iraq has also acceded to many United Nations conventions and treaties, including the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the Kyoto Protocol and protocols and conventions related to the fight against terrorism.

Given the nearly 50 per cent increase in the Iraqi budget compared with last year, and in view of our future aspirations and the improvements owing to increased revenues derived from our natural resources — including our fertile agricultural lands and abundant water, mineral, and human resources — we signed the International Compact with Iraq, aimed at achieving economic prosperity and social justice in partnership with the international community. That document represents a new stage in the establishment of balanced relations between Iraq and the other nations of the world. The First Annual Review Conference of the International Compact, held in Stockholm in May 2008, saw a high level of international participation. Its outcomes included a proposal to establish a new international development partnership that would include a joint financing mechanism for new programmes with international partners in Iraq, as well as an effort to identify critical areas for cooperation on issues such as human development, human rights, reconstruction and economic governance, as points for departure in developing new patterns of international cooperation and assistance with regard to Iraq.

The Government of Iraq would like to thank the international community for assisting us in our efforts to address our crises and challenges. We would also like to thank the countries that have cancelled Iraqi debt and to thank the Secretary-General Secretary for his good efforts to that end.

The Government of Iraq is eager to cooperate with the United Nations and would like to reactivate the Organization's work in our country so that the international community can strengthen its efforts to rebuild Iraq and to support national reconciliation and our democratic experience. We thus call on the United Nations to enhance its presence in Iraq so that those efforts will yield greater results.

We agree with the world's leaders regarding the need to reconsider and reassess the international situation and current political, economic and environmental crises. Indeed, the world has become a village and all events are interlinked, which means that an event in one region of the world will affect events in other regions. Therefore we must engage in dialogue, cooperation, coexistence and understanding in order to emerge from such crises. We also wish to highlight the role of international and regional organizations as mechanisms for promoting dialogue and cooperation. Those are lessons that we have learned from the Iraqi experiment and our own difficulties, and we see no alternative to such an approach in addressing the current complex world situation. Therefore we call on international organizations to rebuild and reactivate their structures and to reduce their routine and bureaucracy.

The problems of the Middle East can be resolved through constructive and meaningful dialogue, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the principles of international law. Therefore the Government of Iraq supports the struggle of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to establish an independent State. We call for the implementation of the resolutions

of international legitimacy in returning the occupied Arab territories. We consider the Arab Peace Initiative endorsed by the Arab Summit to be a good and just basis for the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, and in order to enhance peace and security in the region, we call for the establishment of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction.

The Government of Iraq attaches great importance to reform of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, to improve its performance. While we believe that it is important to expand the Council's membership to make it more representative and more responsive to the great increase in the number of Member States in comparison with 60 years ago, we also believe that it is essential to improve the Council's working methods in order to enhance its effectiveness and capacity to perform, which affect the interests of all Member States. At any rate, the increase in the membership of the Council must not affect its effectiveness or efficiency. Promoting stability and prosperity calls for enhancing cooperation among the countries of the world.

We need to improve relations among the sovereign countries of the world and develop the international system so that it will be fairer and better able to assist development programmes in poor and developing countries through increased support from wealthy countries.

In conclusion, allow me on behalf of my country and the people of Iraq to extend congratulations to the President of the General Assembly. We are confident that his wisdom and remarkable qualities will bring about success in the current session of the General Assembly.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Iraq for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by The Honourable Elias Camsek Chin, Vice-President of the Republic of Palau

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Republic of Palau.

The Honourable Elias Camsek Chin, Vice-President of the Republic of Palau, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency The Honourable Elias Camsek Chin, Vice-President of the Republic of Palau, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Chin (Palau): On behalf of President Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr., and the people of Palau, I offer my congratulations to the President on his election. I assure him and all Member States that the United Nations will have my Government's full cooperation and support in the coming year.

Our existential challenge is climate change. To quote the text prepared for the President's address at the opening of this session, we "cannot accept, under any circumstance, proposals for mandatory emissions reduction targets that take for granted sacrificing the homelands of entire peoples". We must reach an agreement on a set of quantified emission reduction targets for the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. These targets must reflect the urgency of the circumstances.

The post-2012 regime must address mitigating the impacts of climate change on small island developing States. As the text of the President's opening address states, Member States "must be guided by a single consideration: saving those small island States that today live in danger of disappearing entirely as nations". Never before in all history has the disappearance of whole nations been such a real possibility. As we noted in Niue, Palau and the members of the Pacific Islands Forum are deeply concerned about the growing threat that climate change poses not only to our sustainable development, but in fact to our future survival. This is a security matter that has gone unaddressed.

It is for this reason that the Pacific Small Island Developing States submitted a draft resolution at the sixty-second session of the General Assembly requesting that the Security Council honour the Charter of the United Nations and actively continue its consideration of the security implications of climate change. We were gratified by the positive response from the international community and thank our many co-sponsors for their support. We will reintroduce our resolution in the sixty-third session and look forward to Assembly action this fall.

In the meantime, we cannot wait. While Palau contributes little to greenhouse gas emissions, we are taking significant steps to reduce our reliance on fossil fuel, despite the detrimental economic consequences to us. The number of projects on energy efficiency and renewable energy has been increased, and we thank our donor partners for their support. We appreciate the support of Italy and Austria in supporting development cooperation with respect to energy for sustainable development. We also thank the European Union for their ongoing assistance in the area of renewable energy.

We sincerely hope that Taiwan will be able to participate in the specialized agencies of the United Nations. The Republic of China's meaningful participation in those agencies, such as the World Health Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization, would help promote peace and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, enhance important dialogue and help all peoples.

The oceans that surround Palau are the backbone of our nation's existence and are integral to our continued viability as an independent nation. At the sixty-first session we banded together to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems from deep sea bottom trawling, a destructive fishing practice responsible for 95 per cent of the worldwide damage to seamounts. We congratulate the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation for adopting interim measures that are a substantial step towards eliminating bottom trawling. We urge all other regional fisheries management organizations and flag States to follow this example, and we remind everyone that the deadline to take action, 31 December 2008, is fast approaching.

Palau has been active on the issue of bottom trawling because of its effects on ocean ecosystems. The North Pacific is home to some of the world's best remaining fisheries. Their diversity is a key reason for the Micronesia Challenge, whereby the countries and territories of Micronesia joined together to conserve 30 per cent of near-shore marine resources and 20 per cent of land resources by the year 2020.

This project is the first of its kind in the world. It covers 6.7 million square miles of ocean and helps to protect 10 per cent of the world's coral reefs, including more than 60 threatened species. We thank the General Assembly for its recognition of this programme at its sixty-second session, in resolution 62/215 on oceans and law of the sea and thank our development partners, including Turkey, the Global Environment Fund, the Nature Conservancy and Conservation International for their support.

Since Palau joined the United Nations in 1994, we have highlighted our concern that the Organization has no presence in our country. We were pleased therefore when the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund announced that eight new joint offices would open in Pacific island countries, including Palau. We welcome that historic accomplishment and await the opening ceremony.

Palau is an active participant in the efforts of the international community to combat terrorism and has made every effort to improve its anti-terrorism capacity. We have met with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to advance our requests for assistance, particularly in the area of combating money-laundering and terrorism financing. Unfortunately, the efforts of the Directorate have been insufficient. Our experience has been that the capacity-building efforts of the United Nations have focused on helping countries draft and adopt legislation. That is an excellent first step, but an insufficient one, as the best-designed legislation is meaningless without enforcement.

We hope that, during the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, the United Nations will take the next step and help smaller countries that have the drive but not the means to operationalize the laws and regulations they have in place to fight terrorism. We urge the establishment of a voluntary trust fund that would allow small States to develop effective counter-terrorism initiatives. We thank the United States and

Australia for the counter-terrorism assistance they have given us.

Urgent attention should be paid to Security Council reform. Without it, there can be no genuine United Nations reform. Japan has demonstrated its concern for and commitment to Palau and all its Pacific neighbours, and should be a permanent member of the Council. Likewise, India, the world's largest democracy, is a developing nation with a deep sense of involvement in Palau and the rest of the Pacific. We have supported and continue to support the principles of the draft resolution proposed by the Group of Four countries.

We have worked very hard to change the dates for submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. The new submission regime will allow developing countries to preserve our claims to the resources contained in our extended continental shelf. Though that extension of time for submission is welcome, it is only half the battle. We still need the resources and the technical expertise necessary to make a full submission, and we request the assistance of the international community in helping us to achieve that goal.

Palau was the last country to emerge from the United Nations trusteeship system. The United Nations helped to return our sovereignty after four colonial administrations. We are thus particularly proud to advance the objectives of this unique institution and look forward to working together to achieve them during this session of the General Assembly. In closing, let me thank the Assembly in my country's native language: *Kom Kmal Mesulang*.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Palau for the statement he has just made.

The Honourable Elias Camsek Chin, Vice-President of the Republic of Palau, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by The Honourable Winston Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda.

The Honourable Winston Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency The Honourable Winston Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Spencer (Antigua and Barbuda): I wish at the outset to extend heartiest congratulations and assurances of my cooperation and highest esteem to Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. Antigua and Barbuda looks forward to his leadership and guidance throughout this session. Our congratulations also go to his predecessor, Mr. Kerim, on a job well done and for his service to the international community.

I venture to express the hope that the Group of 77 (G-77) and China will find in the President a vigorous advocate for heightened focus and meaningful action in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other agreed development goals.

The sixty-third session of the General Assembly is taking place against a backdrop of escalating challenges to international peace and security: unalleviated poverty and diminishing food supplies for much of the world's population; mega-disasters induced by climate change; and impending meltdown in the world's largest economy. These times and circumstances call for a heightened sense of urgency and a stronger will among all nations to work with and through the United Nations in embracing multilateralism in the fullest sense.

The climate crisis is a clear and present threat to the security of small island States like ours and a major obstacle to the achievement of our sustainable development goals and objectives. The international community is not short of rhetoric on the climate issue, nor is it short of ideas, but we have come up woefully short of political will on the part of those whose actions matter most.

The nexus of climate change and natural disasters is indisputable. Natural disasters are increasing in frequency and devastation around the globe. Such disasters are especially catastrophic for the small countries of the Caribbean, whose economies are

largely dependent on the natural environment. I commend the United Nations and its organs for the work they are doing in Haiti and elsewhere in the Caribbean, which was severely affected by hurricanes over the past weeks. I must, however, call on the international community to lend additional support to the United Nations in its humanitarian efforts in the developing world.

The emerging focus on new energy sources in the United States and elsewhere is also happening to small nations. We are encouraged by the promise of a rollback of the primary contributors to the causes of climate change. The responsibility to provide the necessary resources to do that must be born primarily by those developed countries which contribute most to the causes of climate change.

In a similar context, vulnerable developing societies are victims to the globalization of crime, notably in the havoc wrought by handguns in the possession of criminal elements, the trafficking of narcotics destined essentially for markets in developed countries, and the deportation of criminals to our shores. We urge the international community, in recognition of the link between globalization and crime, to provide greater support for the efforts of small island States to fight crime, strengthen the rule of law and combat international drug trafficking. We also call on developed countries to stop the practice of deporting violent criminals to our shores.

Antigua and Barbuda is also keenly concerned about the issue of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The Caribbean is a zone of peace, but none of us is beyond the impact and effect of weapons of mass destruction. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons should be fully implemented and adhered to by all countries.

The constant threat that terrorism poses in today's highly globalized world makes nuclear disarmament even more imperative. We will continue to promote a nuclear-free zone in Latin America and the Caribbean, and encourage all countries, particularly the leading industrialized nations, to vigorously pursue and support disarmament.

I have looked critically at some of the problems facing the global family of nations. I conclude on a note of optimism.

We have recently seen a number of leaders apologizing to the African diaspora, to indigenous peoples and to former colonies for past wrongs and injustices. We have even seen binding commitment to reparation, as in the case of Italy and Libya. I salute those leaders who have demonstrated such enlightenment.

More Governments are accepting the inevitability of democratic political change and are showing a growing commitment to good governance, fair and free elections and the orderly transfer and sharing of power. Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa come to mind immediately and deserve commendation.

Finally, it is fascinating how both candidates in the United States presidential election are vying for the change franchise in that country. As a representative of the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda, I call on the United States administration and its future leadership to effect change in its dealings with our brother nation of the Republic of Cuba.

I call on the United States to end the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on our brothers and sisters in Cuba. As a world leader and defender of justice, the United States must embrace change fully in the interests of the men, women and children of Cuba.

I firmly believe that the United Nations would be a more potent entity and the world could be infinitely better placed if the next president of the United States in his inauguration address gave an irrevocable commitment to multilateralism in all its dimensions.

Permit me in my capacity as the Chair of the G-77 and China to offer a few comments on behalf of the group.

The United Nations and the broader international community have spent much time and other resources over two decades identifying, defining and reaching a common understanding on major challenges to global society. We have passed resolutions and declarations in which we have defined the challenges, identified the resources needed and resolved and committed to meeting and overcoming the challenges as a global community through international cooperation. In some cases, we have agreed and set binding time frames to achieve results.

Many of these commitments, timetables and proposals for action have been repeated in annual

resolutions of the General Assembly. Unfortunately, many have become more technically complicated, while there has been less and less political commitment to action supporting their unified and mutually reinforcing implementation.

We have had some modest gains, as, for example, in our fight against HIV/AIDS and malaria. However, in general, our record of implementation and delivery on commitments is a source of embarrassment to us as leaders.

We are confronted by an endemic crisis of development, including the failure of development policies and approaches that do not take into account the specific situation of countries and regions.

This has resulted in growing inequities within and across countries, an environmental and climate change crisis with unsustainable pressures on production and ecosystems, a global economic and financial crisis spreading from the major economies, a crisis of confidence in global governance and institutional capacity for managing international trade, finance and development policies, a worsening energy crisis, an unprecedented food crisis, and a looming water crisis.

We recognize that each country has the primary responsibility for its development. However, the international community must create a conducive, sustainable, fair and predictable environment and provide the necessary policy space to stimulate and facilitate the discharge of this responsibility.

We must all move immediately into implementation mode — a mode where our focus is on how to do rather than how not to do. We have some important strategic opportunities ahead to begin to do so.

The G-77 and China believe that we could begin with today's high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals.

At the midpoint we, as an international community, are in danger of missing most of the MDG targets. We have not provided the resources, the conducive international environment and the cooperation to ensure that all developing countries can meet their specific targets.

Several sources were identified in Monterrey through which the financing could be mobilized to address the commitments to tackle many of the challenges, including those summarized in the Millennium Development Goals.

Let us use the process leading up to the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development, and the Conference itself, to offer specific proposals on how we will provide and use resources, and on how we will set about shaping the international economic environment in order to speed achievement of those objectives and targets, as well as increase the participation of developing countries.

In December 2007, the Bali process reaffirmed the international community's resolve to ensure that, by the end of 2009, it will have a clear idea about commitments from Annex I Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on greenhouse gas-reduction for the second commitment period, as well as their commitments on firm actions and resources to facilitate adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and financing for Non-Annex I Parties.

The outcomes of the United Nations Climate Change Conference to be held in Copenhagen in 2009 must be robust and implementation-driven. The various intergovernmental activities on the energy and food crises scheduled for the coming months should be focused not only on solutions to the immediate problems of food insecurity and energy issues, but also on long-term sustainable developmental imperatives.

These are illustrations of the opportunities which can and should be used by the international community to foster implementation of both outstanding and new commitments. They are by no means exhaustive. The Group of 77 and China would urge the General Assembly to resolve to promptly send a message communicating the urgency of implementing those various processes and activities.

The Acting President *(spoke in French)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda for the statement he has just made.

The Honourable Winston Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, was escorted from the rostrum.

The meeting rose at 2.30 p.m.